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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000906

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/18/2028
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S FIRST MEETING WITH DEFENSE MINISTER

REF: A. QUITO 358
[1](#)B. QUITO 488
[1](#)C. QUITO 834

Classified By: Ambassador Heather Hodges for Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador paid a courtesy call on Minister of Defense (MOD) Javier Ponce on September 17. The discussion was cordial and frank, and Ponce seemed interested in maintaining a positive working relationship. However, Minister Ponce expressed a desire to ensure that bilateral cooperation was coordinated with Ecuador's best interests in mind. The Minister asked for assistance in purchasing GPS technology for monitoring marine activity, and confirmed an interest in visiting the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM). (End Summary)

[1](#)2. (C) The Ambassador complimented Defense Minister Javier Ponce on the Ecuadorian military's successes in the Northern Border region and on its good cooperation with the Embassy. Ponce expressed appreciation for our bilateral cooperation but also a concern that the courses given to Ecuadorian military personnel have not met the needs of the Ecuadorian military. He commented that a GOE-appointed commission charged with reviewing the structure of Ecuador's intelligence services had just completed its report (Refs A, B, C), and that one of its findings was that military personnel who have received training in the U.S. feel obliged to provide the USG with information. He suggested that working-level contacts from each of the services coordinate with their counterparts in the Military Group to draft a training proposal for the Minister's approval. Ponce suggested that advance notification of course content might alleviate the problem.

[1](#)3. (C) Ponce further expressed gratitude for the USG's assistance in building military infrastructure in the Northern Border region, but again registered concern with the operational assistance received in that region. Specifically, he questioned the role of the Military Group's Tactical Assistance Field Team (TAFT) position located within the Ecuadorian military Fourth Division Headquarters in Coca, Orellana province. (Note: The MOD is likely concerned about access by the TAFT to information and is not requesting to decrease USG assistance to the Armed Forces.) Separately, Minister Ponce suggested to the DATT during a reception at

the Ambassador's residence on September 18 that interested parties from the Embassy and GOE meet after the September 28 constitutional referendum to discuss the TAFT position.

¶4. (C) Minister Ponce asked the Ambassador for USG financial assistance to help buy GPS chip technology that would allow the GOE's security forces to monitor the location of all boats less than 20 tons in size (Ref C). The DATT noted that while the proposed GPS technology would assist the GOE in identifying beacons ships, the USG-offered Cooperative Nation Information Exchange System (CNIES) would be a good complement to the technology, helping to identify both ships that are beacons and not beacons. (Note: The GOE has not agreed to sign a CNIES agreement. Although military leaders have expressed interest in signing, political leadership has objected to the clause restricting lethal use of force, considering it an infringement on Ecuadorian sovereignty.)

¶5. (C) General Pena raised the issue of Ecuador's recognition of a 200 nautical mile delineation of territorial waters, and noted that during a brief bilateral meeting on September 5 with Principal Assistant Secretary of Defense Peter Verga and WHA DASD Steve Johnson at the Defense Ministerial of the Americas meeting in Banff, Canada, Verga agreed to provide a courtesy notification to the GOE when U.S. assets enter international waters within Ecuador's exclusive economic zone (200 nautical miles offshore). (Note: U.S. cables on the same meeting indicate no discussion of the issue.)

¶6. (C) Following up on SOUTHCOM Commander Admiral Stavridis' original invitation during his June 10 visit to Quito, Ambassador Hodges asked whether Minister Ponce would be interested in visiting SOUTHCOM. Ponce responded that he would not be able to do so now, but asked for the Military Group commander to arrange future dates and details with the Minister's staff.
Hodges